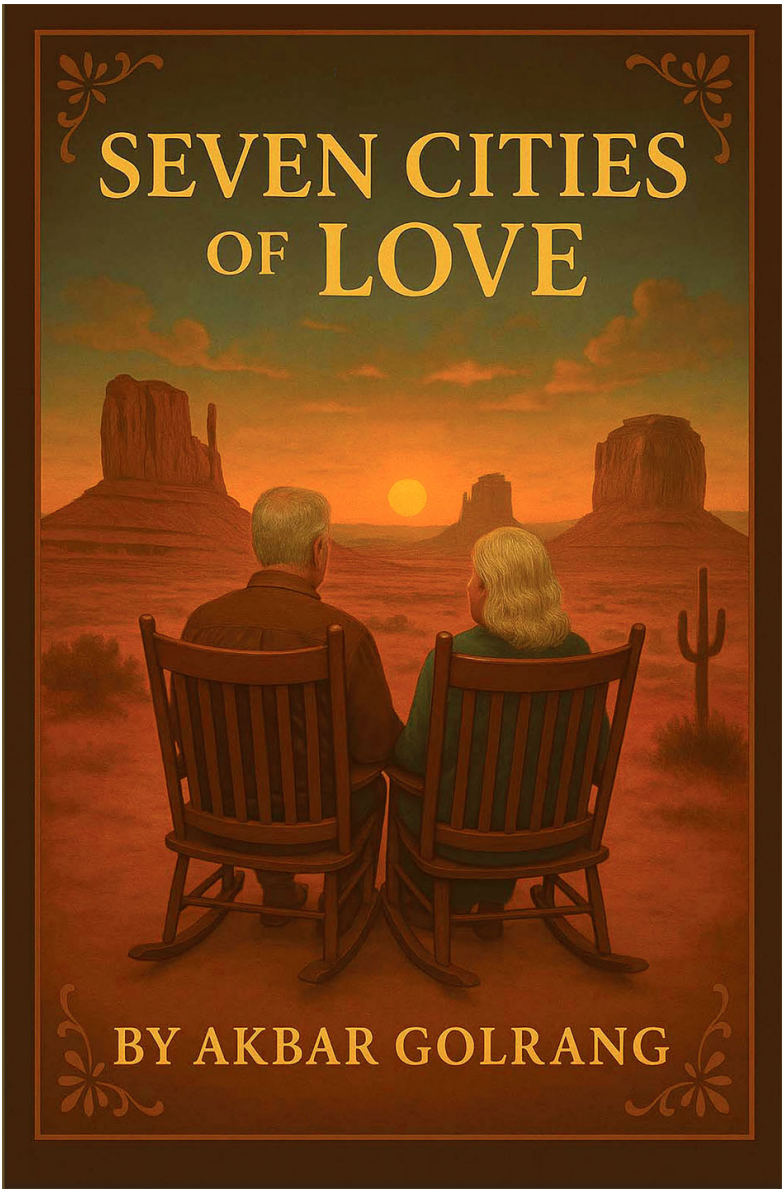
SEVEN CITIES
OF LOVE
BY AKBAR GOLRANG

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SEVEN CITIES OF LOVE

Akbar Golrang

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Some of the stories in this collection, which appeared in the author's previously published works, have been revised, re-edited, and modified to some extent for this new edition.

From the loveless, I learned love

Akbar Golrang

Seven Cities of Love is a collection of seven short and medium-length stories revolving around the theme of love. Except for well-known people, all names in this collection are fictitious, and any similarity to real individuals is purely coincidental.

Akbar Golrang

Seven Cities of Love

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Riddle of Lover's Pulse

Elizabeth and Matthew, two young lovers

Elizabeth and Matthew met at eighteen—still young, still discovering who they were. What began as a simple friendship in high school gradually deepened into something tender, sincere, and quietly intense.

Matthew was drawn to the natural world; Elizabeth found herself captivated by mathematics.

Back then, their connection was so visible that it became a model for their classmates—some even referred to them as Romeo and Juliet.

As the years passed, their bond grew even deeper.

They learned to trust each other, to share their hopes and fears, and to support one another through the ups and downs.

Their love wasn't big or loud. It was kind and steady—the kind that stays strong, even in silence.

When they were nineteen, they knew their love was strong enough to build a life together.

They got engaged, calm and sure, ready to move forward side by side.

Many people fall out of love, but theirs was rare and lasting.

They enjoyed different things:

Matthew loved working with flowers—he saw beauty in petals, colors, and the way arrangements could express feelings without saying a word.

Elizabeth was interested in what people kept hidden.

She spent her time trying to understand deeper meaning—especially through Morse code, where silence and timing were just as important as the sounds themselves.

Matthew loved Elizabeth in quiet ways. He showed his feelings through gestures instead of words, creating moments that moved her more deeply than she ever expected.

Their love did not burn brightly, only to fade.

It endured—steadfast, unwavering—whispering of hope even in the face of time and trials.

The Hidden Language of Flowers and Morse

Matthew's family worked with flowers. They made flower bunches and sold them. When Matthew was little, he saw that flowers could show feelings. To him, flowers were not just pretty—they had special meaning. Each group of flowers was like a quiet message without speaking.

Matthew had a flower shop on East Vista Way.

It was more than a shop to him. It felt calm and safe, like a quiet and happy place. The space was calm and quiet, and it helped people feel close to him.

Visitors came not only for the bouquets, but also for comfort.

Matthew didn't just put flowers together. He used them to show feelings in a quiet way, like a gentle message to the heart.

Elizabeth was different. She didn't use words to share how she felt. Instead, she used Morse code—its dots and pauses helped her find meaning where others heard only silence.

To her, silence wasn't empty—it held feeling, for those who paid close attention.

To her, love was something she could feel in quiet moments, in being present, and in understanding without needing to explain.

She had an exceptional talent for noticing things others missed. Her way of understanding Morse code—those dots and dashes—wasn't just impressive. It showed how tuned in she was to quiet moments and the emotions beneath them.

Even though Matthew and Elizabeth didn't see things the same way, it never caused problems.

Their differences brought them closer together.

They helped each other grow, each bringing something special to the relationship—like two colors that stand out more when they're side by side.

They felt close even without talking.

Just a look or a soft touch could share their feelings.

Their love was calm and strong. They trusted each other and felt safe together. As if see their love best during quiet times, when they sat together and felt like they truly belonged.

Their love became more than a story—it became a whispered legend in Vista, a devotion so steadfast and subtle it lingered like a secret held between petals, waiting to be rediscovered.

Even their families, witnessing the grandeur of their wedding, envisioned the children who might one day carry forward this extraordinary love.

Love in Mute Language

One evening, Elizabeth asked Matthew, "What is the hidden language of love when you want to tell me you love me through flowers?"

He smiled and replied, "I would craft a bouquet of lilies for devotion, soft-hued peonies for romance, and roses for deep affection. That is my silent declaration of love."

Curious, he asked, "And what is the hidden language of love—when you want to tell me you love me in Morse?"

Elizabeth's fingers traced the air, as if feeling the rhythm before she spoke. "Morse for 'I love you' is '.. / .-.. — ...- . / -.— — ..-,'" she said softly.

"And if you wanted to say it with no doubt—if you wished to tell me, 'I will always love you,' how would you say it?" he asked, his gaze steady on hers.

She smiled gently and replied, ".. / .-- .. .-.. .-.. / .- .-.. .-- .- -.-- ... / .-.. --- ...- . / -.-- --- ..-."

They showed their love with flowers, light, and quiet signs that only they understood.

Flowers and Morse code weren't just ways to say "I love you." They were their love.

Each flower and signal had its own special meaning. But even though Elizabeth enjoyed those patterns, deep down she wanted something solid and reliable. Love was beautiful, but it could be uncertain, and that made her feel uneasy.

A Choice Made in Silence

Elizabeth didn't expect her life to change the day she met James.

James, a successful real estate agent, was calm, careful, and ten years older than Elizabeth—a man who built his days on routine and reliability. He wasn't loud or charming. He didn't rush anything. He offered her the kind of peace she didn't know she needed.

James liked to plan his life. He made choices carefully, like planting seeds and hoping they'd grow. He didn't take risks—he picked things that felt safe and lasting.

Matthew was different. He didn't follow routines or plan ahead. He went after whatever felt true in the moment.

When he was in Elizabeth's life, everything felt alive. Their days were full of surprises—midnight talks that stretched into morning, road trips with no destination, and laughter in places they didn't expect. He didn't care where they were going, only how it felt getting there.

Life with him was exciting but uncertain. It was like standing in the wind—pushed forward by something she couldn't control. Wild, beautiful, and impossible to hold still.

Now, standing between two kinds of love—one wild and fleeting, the other quiet and steady—Elizabeth found herself listening not to what others said, but to the silence inside her. And in that silence, something true began to take shape.

She thought, '*James steadied my growing uncertainties, yet that contrast stirred something profound within me—an unrest I could neither name nor silence.*'

James lived his life with careful control, like an experienced real estate agent. He saw things—love, choices, even short moments of happiness or sadness—as something to manage and keep in order. He gave Elizabeth the steady life she wanted. But underneath it all, he carried a quiet fear.

James knew too well: houses crumble, foundations crack. Even the most promising investments carry some level of risk. And though he never voiced it aloud, the thought haunted him—*Was I offering Elizabeth refuge, or merely the illusion of security*?

James became a sanctuary for Elizabeth—a refuge from the uncertainties love had once brought her.

She made a choice that surprised many, including herself—a decision that surfaced from some deep, hidden part of her—unexpected yet undeniable.

The Quiet That Says Everything

Elizabeth chose security over passion, predictability over the intoxicating chaos of devotion.

As that choice settled within her, it pressed upon her heart with quiet, unyielding force—not as regret but as certainty, weighted and absolute. It did not waver; it did not apologize. It was the kind of truth that shaped its own gravity.

One night at home, with a dim light above them, Elizabeth looked at Matthew and told him honestly, "I love someone else now," she said, her voice trembling.

Silence followed, but not the kind that soothes. It was a silence that scraped at the edges of Matthew's sanity, loud with the sound of everything unraveling. Her words didn't hit him like a blow; they seeped into him like poison—slow and disorienting—until reality itself began to shimmer and warp.

Matthew just listened to the words—yet he felt something inside him come undone. His thoughts lost focus, drifting in and out like weak radio signals.

Her Loving Eyes

Thomas's Journey of Emotions and Hope

At seventy, Thomas often thought about his life—full of ups and downs, challenges, and hope.

Since graduating from the University of Arizona at twenty-two, he had spent years searching for a pair of warm brown eyes that once caught his attention.

That brief moment left a deep impression on him and shaped his journey.

Thomas's Life and Memories

For forty-six years, Thomas worked as a psychologist.

He was known for being kind and helping people understand their feelings. But he never forgot those eyes—they stayed in his memory, guiding him through life.

His search for Rosa, the woman with those eyes, took him across the world, driven by hope.

Now, he sat in a rocking chair on the porch of his childhood home in the Arizona desert.

The chair made a soft creaking sound as the wind blew gently.

He sipped his coffee, enjoying its warmth and the calm moment as he looked out at sunset on the vast horizon, glowing with shades of gold, orange, and red—a beautiful way for the day to end.

His Home and Memories

The house, given to him by his parents, held many memories.

The old wooden floor creaked, and the peeling wallpaper showed its age—but these were reminders of love and loss.

Black-and-white photos of his parents hung on the walls, connecting him to a time before sadness changed his life.

Thomas's father died in the Korean War, and his mother was so sad that she had a hard time living without him.

After his mother was gone, young Thomas held onto memories of her kindness and warm smile.

He still remembered being six years old, reaching for her hug—a short but intense moment that made him feel how much he missed her.

A Love That Never Faded

He remembered the day she became part of his life in 1967—a busy morning in the university library in Arizona, crowded because it was graduation day.

As he stood in line to return his book, he noticed Rosa trying to hold a heavy pile of French books. The moment Thomas saw her, he was drawn to her deep, magnetic brown eyes.

Their short conversation stayed in his mind.

Rosa, who said she had finished her studies in French, was getting ready to leave.

Thomas, armed with his psychology degree, suggested they meet again.

She mentioned she would be singing in the orchestra's choir at the graduation gala and promised they could reconnect afterward.

As she walked away, she turned and looked back, her eyes filled with emotion she didn't say out loud.

That moment stirred something deep within Thomas—an undeniable longing that made him feel something strong; he missed her.

The Doorbell and Reality

Back home, lost in thought, Thomas was suddenly startled by the doorbell. His heart raced. *Was it her*? *Had she come to see me*? *Would she step through his door and bring back the feelings I had been holding inside*?

But the image he saw was a mirage.

It was just a food delivery boy.

Disappointed, he accepted the food and tried to strangle his illogical dreams.

Graduation Day Celebration

The ceremony was filled with energy as students, families, and friends came together to celebrate a significant moment.

Thomas looked around the crowd, his heart beating faster when he spotted Rosa among the choir singers, standing tall and graceful.

Throughout the performance, excitement built inside him—he wanted to talk to her so badly that it became almost unbearable.

A decisive Moment

The hall was packed with people as the chorus performed.

Thomas kept his eyes on Rosa among the singers until the final note faded and the group began mingling with their invited families.

Thomas turned toward Rosa. A rush of confidence stirred inside him—part nervousness, part courage.

"Can we meet later?" he asked.

She smiled. "Sure. How about Cactus Brew & Co. tomorrow at 3 p.m.?"

Her heart fluttered. "Okay, see you there."

While Rosa celebrated with her mother and friends, Thomas stood beside his stepfather, who beamed with pride, quietly joyful at seeing her so happy.

Thoughts on the Way Home

On the way home, Thomas's stepfather spoke cheerfully. "I know your dad and mom would be proud. But that's life—we don't need to be sad about those who are gone."

Thomas nodded. "I'm always thankful for everything you've done for me."

His stepfather's voice became serious. "I've told you before—I respect your dad every time I think of him. He saved my life in 1952 during the Korean War. He died on April 27, 1953, just before the war ended. Before he passed, he asked me to take care of you as my own son. I have kept that promise."

Thomas, deeply moved, whispered, "I appreciate it—and I miss my mom."

His stepfather sighed. "She went through a lot after your dad died. In the end, illness took her."

Quiet filled the car as they both thought about the past. But soon, Thomas's mind returned to Rosa—*would tomorrow bring another chance*?

Meeting at 'Cactus Brew & Co.'

The next day, as planned, Thomas went to the café Cactus Brew & Co. near Arizona University.

It was warm and comfortable, with desert-themed decorations that made it feel inviting.

At exactly 3 p.m., the door opened. Rosa walked in, her bright eyes shining and her smile warm and welcoming.

She moved toward him with graceful familiarity. "Hi," she said gently.

Rain tapped softly on the window, while the fireplace inside gave the café a gentle, cozy warmth.

Rosa hung her raincoat next to Thomas's umbrella, put her notebook on the table, and sat across from him.

She looked curiously at the window, then smiled sweetly at Thomas and said, "It looks like the weather report was right—it is."

The rain poured in through the open door, fresh and soothing, softening the afternoon air.

Their laughter mixed with the soothing music from the café's speakers, warming the moment.

As the hours passed, a gentle peace settled between them—something new was developing.

To start talking about a subject as a polite beginning, she said, "This place isn't just any café. It is a place where ideas spark and beginnings take root."

Thomas looked at her and said, “Even though it’s raining, it’s so wonderful to be with you in this place. Yes! We were both ready—you brought your raincoat, and I brought my umbrella. We were prepared for the rain.” Then, in a gentle voice, he added, “You have stunning eyes.”

Shared Histories and Future Uncertainty

Rosa smiled gracefully. “I’ve heard that before. I have my mother’s eyes,” she said with quiet pride. “My mom grew up in Abadan,” Rosa said gently. “She and her family left Iran hoping to start over in America. It wasn’t easy for them.”

Thomas leaned closer. “What about your father?”

Rosa paused, her tone softening. “He served in the Army—he was from Arizona. In 1951, he was sent to Korea. I was six when he left.” She took a slow breath. “He didn’t come home. My mother raised me by herself.” Soon, I’ll join a medical team as a combat medic in Vietnam. What about you?”

As they went toward the self-service counter to get hot tea and cookies. Thomas offered a faint smile. “I was summoned for compulsory conscription. Since I graduated in psychology, they’ve assigned me as a second lieutenant.”

Once they had settled into their seats, their conversation came easily, full of small smiles and shared memories.

Thomas looked at Rosa, his gaze steady and unwavering. “Seems I’ll be heading to Vietnam as well,” he said, his voice low but calm.

Rosa said. “There’s always war,” she said in a tense voice. “It ruins everything—places, people, even stories that should have been passed on.”

Love In Abadan

Kaloo and Keshoo

By 1971, everyone in Abadan was familiar with Kayhan.

By the time he was twenty-three, half his life had passed behind bars in correctional facilities and prisons. The other half had been spent on various law-breaking endeavors to stay on the line, waiting to be condemned anew in prison.

Born in 1948, Kayhan's childhood ended at the age of five when his mother, his entire world, left him at a religious orphanage in Abadan.

From that moment, his past became a shattered mosaic, with no clear memory of either parent.

The only image that remained—sharp, haunting, unchangeable—was the moment his mother left him behind and walked away, tears glistening in her eyes as she abandoned him to the cold walls of a place he would later recognize as an orphanage.

That memory haunted him—sometimes vivid, sometimes distant.

Over time, he came to believe that losing her had cost him a part of his soul. It also bound him, silently, to others who had suffered the same fate.

But in return, something darker took root—a quiet, unshakable hatred for the world.

The orphanage staff, meant to care for him, became enforcers of strict discipline. No one could mend the emptiness his mother had left behind. No one could soften the ache that grew inside him. Instead, they drowned his sorrow with harsh hands and punishment.

Every strike, every reprimand added another brick to the fortress of bitterness he was building—one wound at a time.

By his teenage years, he had begun breaking the law in every way possible, becoming a constant target for the police and detention centers.

He primarily acted as a conduit for Iranian job seekers arriving in Abadan, eager to cross into Kuwaiti territory, which, at the time, needed foreign labor.

Because of his daring and defiant nature, those who knew him called him 'Kaloo'—an Abadani nickname for someone reckless, stubborn, and unyielding.

Life Is Long

In 1968, at the age of twenty, Kaloo fell in love with Keshwar, a lively young woman known across Abadan as 'Keshoo.'

She had just turned eighteen, full of laughter, charm, and a quiet defiance against the expectations life tried to place on her.

That same year, they married.

Their love was so profound and undeniable that it became a symbol of devotion in the city.

When people spoke of a couple deeply in love, they would say, "They're like Kaloo and Keshoo."

The newlyweds moved into a rented room in a two-story house.

The upper level had ten separate rooms, each occupied by either one person or a childless couple.

The layout allowed the tenants to live independently while remaining close to one another.

Downstairs, the bottom floor had two parts.

The first part was a big open room, like a café, with benches and tables where people laughed and talked easily.

Next to it was a shared kitchen with two stoves that burned kerosene.

Here, the residents came together to cook and eat as a group.

In that same section, there were three bathrooms with showers, each providing both warm and cold water.

But these people were more than just neighbors—they were like family. They shared happy and sad moments, always helping one another through tough times.

For Kaloo and Keshoo, this close-knit group became their safe place, their support system, and their home.

Three years passed, and although their love grew strong, they still had no children.

Society expected them to have kids, and people talked about it, sometimes judging them.

Others asked questions, sometimes speaking harshly.

But none of them had the slightest idea about Kaloo's childhood—how his mother, forced by financial hardship, had abandoned him at an orphanage. The experience left him with a deep-seated fear of bringing a child into the world, terrified that they might face the same fate he once endured.

Still, whenever someone asked why they had no children, Kaloo and Keshoo gave a simple answer: "Life is long."

The Arrival of the Bushehri Man in Abadan

In 1974, a young man in his twenties arrived in Abadan from Bushehr, searching for a better future.

Determined to change his fate, he rented a small room in that shared house and became its newest resident.

After trying again and again, he finally got a job at the docks in Khorramshahr. The work was hard and dangerous, but it paid well.

Every day, under the burning sun, he lifted heavy cargo. His hands hurt. His body was tired. Still, he kept going—not just for himself, but because his elderly mother needed him.

Before sunrise, he was taken to the port. He worked until dark, got paid, went home, and started over the next day. No weekends. No breaks. Just work, nonstop.

There was no insurance. If he got hurt, no one would help. But he accepted the risk. He was chasing a dream—and he refused to let go.

For two years, he remained withdrawn, exchanging only brief greetings with the other tenants.

The only detail anyone knew about him had slipped from the landlord's lips one evening—he was saving money to buy a modest shed in Bushehr, a place where his elderly mother could spend the rest of her days in comfort. His determination never wavered; his goal was noble.

Love Built on Shoreline Sand

Elegance and Echoes

Liza was 28 and worked as a fashion designer.

Many people looked up to her.

Her stylish house in San Diego showcased her success—but it also revealed the quiet and lonely nature of her life.

She was the only child in a wealthy family, and her parents always loved and supported her.

To most people, Liza seemed quiet and shy.

Those who knew her well could see how strong she was on the inside.

She ran her business with focus and confidence, and other designers respected her for it. Still, her work took up most of her time; therefore, she hadn't made much space for love.

She never talked about it, but her parents sometimes asked why she hadn't found someone special yet.

"I'm still waiting for the right man," Liza would say.

Her parents understood her, even if they still worried. To them, she was their daughter first—no matter how successful or grown-up she was. They hoped she'd start her own family someday, filled with love, laughter, and maybe children.

Liza had spent a lot of time thinking about love, more than anyone guessed.

She wasn't scared of it—she just didn't want to end up with someone who didn't really fit her heart. Life hadn't always been easy, but she stayed calm and assertive.

Even when she was by herself, she didn't feel lost. Deep down, she still hoped to find someone who truly understood her.

She hadn't given up—she was still searching, still believing love would come her way.

A Gentle Start to Love

In December 2021, Liza decided to look for love.

Even though she was usually shy, she gave online dating a try. It was something she'd never done before, and she wasn't sure how it would go—but she stayed hopeful.

Not long after, she met Robert. He was 29 and seemed really kind.

His calm voice helped her feel relaxed around him.

He was handsome, intelligent, and caring.

During a conversation with Liza, Robert told her that before he started law school, he worked for six years in private security.

Now, halfway through his studies, he was focused and driven in a way that felt familiar to Liza.

Their first date went smoothly.

They talked easily, laughed together, and felt an unexpected spark.

Liza and Robert's Gentle Bond

Liza felt something different with Robert.

She could talk to him freely, without worrying about saying the wrong thing. Their connection was calm and easy, growing slowly over time.

The more they were together, the closer they became.

Their relationship wasn't rushed—it was built on simple things: kindness, respect, and the quiet way they understood each other without needing to explain much.

To Liza, Robert felt special. She could speak openly with him. There was no pressure—just a slow, natural connection.

As they spent more time together, their relationship grew stronger.

Building a Life Together

Robert and Liza grew close quickly.

In just a few months, Robert moved in with Liza, and they began planning to build a life full of love, both for themselves and their future children, filled with love, trust, and shared goals.

They got married on March 12, 2022, in a small, private ceremony.

After settling into daily life, Robert brought up something practical: life insurance.

It wasn't romantic, but it was thoughtful.

He saw it as a way to protect their future.

Liza agreed, and together they took a quiet step toward long-term commitment.

Their desire to spend their honeymoon in Hawaii, with its tropical atmosphere, singing oceans, storytelling sunsets, and waking up together to the sound of the breeze dancing with the surrounding leaves, made their unforgettable stay in that beautiful place.

The Best Kind of Escape

Liza and Robert arrived in Hawaii on the morning of April 15, 2022.

They stepped off the plane hand in hand, ready to begin their honeymoon.

The air was warm and soft, the beaches quiet, and palm trees waved lazily overhead. Everything felt calm and welcoming—as if the island had been waiting just for them.

They rented a bright blue car and set off to explore.

At every turn, they found something new: long stretches of ocean shimmering in the sun, cheerful fruit stands by the road, and flowers so bright they looked painted.

They joked over fresh coconuts and walked barefoot through the sand.

With each shared moment, they grew closer.

That night, Robert had a simple idea—to go somewhere high and quiet to look at the moon.

Liza liked the idea and didn't want to waste time—so she got behind the wheel and started driving.

The road went up slowly, curving through trees and steep hills.

By the time they reached the top, the sun had completely disappeared.

Stars were scattered across the sky.

The wind moved gently through the trees, but everything else was quiet.

Far below, the ocean looked huge, dark, and endless.

Moonlight spread softly across the hills, making everything glow a quiet silver.

It felt like time had stopped.

No sounds. No distractions. Just the two of them and the moonlit sky.

Around 8:30 p.m., they found a large, flat rock near the edge of a cliff and sat down on it.

Her quiet strength and his gentle warmth fit together like puzzle pieces.

They sat close together, watching the stars and quietly dreaming.

They talked about building a life—sharing a home filled with love, hearing little feet running through the hall, and growing old while still feeling young at heart.

It felt honest and intimate, as if they were envisioning something they could truly create together.

Nothing about it seemed like a fantasy.

It felt solid. Possible. Right there in front of them.

They sat together, enjoying the quiet night.

Everything felt safe and full of hope, like nothing could go wrong.

But while they were lost in that peaceful moment, something began to shift, quietly and out of sight.

That gentle night was about to change—soon, everything would be different, and they had no idea what was coming. The night was about to take a turn they never could have imagined.

Time that Echoed Beyond the Moment

At 10:10 p.m., everything changed.

A panicked call came in to the local police.

A man's voice, shaking and scared, said he and his wife had been driving a blue rental car when something went wrong. She was driving. They had gone off the road—and tumbled deep into Waipi'o Valley.

The dispatcher moved quickly.

Within minutes, emergency crews were heading out, speeding through the dark with urgency.

The roads near Hawaii's valleys are tough to drive—sharp turns, sudden drops, and narrow paths through rough land. At night, they're even worse. Waipi'o Valley was especially dangerous, with steep cliffs and hidden risks.

The crash site was hard to reach, buried in thick trees and uneven ground. But the rescue teams got there fast, prepared for what they might find.

Near the roadside, they found a man sitting on the ground, clutching his cell phone tightly. It was Robert. He looked frozen—pale, shaking, and crying.

He tried to talk, but the shock had locked him inside himself.

Something awful had happened.

Rescue teams got to work right away. They made the area safe and started looking for Liza, slowly and carefully heading down into the valley using special equipment. Every step they took was full of hope that she might still be alive.

Soon, three police cars arrived, their flashing lights lighting up the dark and quiet scene.

Love Mirage from Marengo to Paradio

My Winter, 1951 – Marengo, Illinois

In 1951, my world transformed into a magical winter wonderland in Marengo, Illinois, when I was six years old.

Even though it was really cold in Illinois, I sat outside our warm little house.

Snow covered the ground like a fresh white blanket.

My gray cat, Cati, was curled up in my lap, purring softly.

The sound helped calm the quiet around me.

I watched my mom chopping wood, steady and strong. Her breath came out in little white clouds that disappeared into the cold air.

Suddenly, the door creaked open. My dad came out, too drunk to walk straight.

My mom's face went pale with anger. Her eyes lit up with fire as she stood tall and faced him.

Cati was calm and kind when he walked up to my dad, but my dad pushed him away.

Cati yelled and jumped back, frightened.

By then, most people across America—even in small towns like ours in Illinois—were driving cars. But a coachman from a nearby village, who loved horses and wagons, came riding in on his horse-drawn carriage, right when we needed him.

He stepped down with practiced ease, secured the reins around a wooden knob beside his seat, and greeted my mother with a respectful nod.

Unaffected by the earlier disorder, my mother ushered out a pale young horse and finalized a deal with the driver.

He tallied the cash, passed it to her, then climbed back onto his wagon and left, the young horse trotting behind.

I remained still, staring as they disappeared down the lane.

That young horse, once the tender embodiment of my youthful hopes, dissolved into the boundless sweep of wintry road, a quiet emptiness settling in its place.

I wished for a life as strong and steady as the tall oak trees—not short and fading like the fallen leaves.

In Search of a New Life

Back in 1963, when I was eighteen, I often daydreamed about a mysterious prince—someone who would take me away to a perfect life, where everything felt magical and full of joy.

These dreams showed how much I longed for love—something special and bigger than everyday life.

The dance hall drew people in, its lights dim except for one flickering bulb that cast a gentle glow.

Young women who resembled Julie Andrews, Shirley MacLaine, and Marilyn Monroe moved smoothly across the floor with men who possessed the charm of James Dean, Rock Hudson, and Elvis Presley.

Their happy laughter filled the room with energy and a feeling that the night was something special.

Noah, a former classmate who had styled himself as a replica of Marlon Brando, caught my eye and motioned for me to join him.

We danced and got caught up in the excitement of the night. But when I quietly asked, we stepped away from the party.

Outside, the cool night air wrapped around us as we sat together on the porch—a peaceful place where we shared our first kiss. It was gentle, a little nervous, and full of happiness.

Over time, our connection grew stronger and turned into something deeper.

Noah and I planned a picnic in the woods on a fabulous fall day.

We rode our bikes there, backpacks full of food, and let the quiet of the forest wash over us.

The leaves glowed in rich autumn colors, rustling gently in the breeze as the trees whispered in the background.

After about two hours of cycling, we reached a quiet, wooded spot and sat down on a worn bench under the trees to rest.

Noah took his thermos of coffee out of his backpack, poured it for both of us, and as we sipped the hot coffee, we talked about our hopes and dreams for the future, both believing that we would build a life together full of love and exciting times.

As we talked, the weather shifted, and dark clouds swallowed the sun. Lightning flashed across the sky, turning the peaceful forest into a shadowy, somber place.

Raindrops fell over our heads like an avalanche and whipped toward the ground like the hair on a ponytail.

We hastily gathered our belongings and dashed to find shelter.

As the storm raged, we found a huge boulder with a shallow cave carved into its side—a perfect place to take cover.

Inside the shelter, the storm faded to a faint hum.

I stopped shivering, coughed once, and slowly felt more like myself.

The calm around me felt even deeper because of the weather chaos still raging outside.

Distortion In My Intern Life

A few months later, Noah and I decided to take our relationship to the next level—we moved in together.

I worked as an assistant in a big office with wide windows that showed the city. It had been six months, but I still didn't feel right there. People around me didn't seem friendly. Some whispered when I walked by, and their laughter felt sharp, like little cuts in the air.

One afternoon, the phone on my desk started ringing.

It was my manager who requested to speak with me directly.

He spoke to me in a stern voice, telling me to pay more attention to my job and stop bothering the people around me.

The next morning, I came out of the bedroom and dropped onto the couch.

I felt utterly drained.

Noah stepped into the room and looked at me. His eyes were full of worry. He asked in a quiet voice, "Are you okay?"

I was stuck inside myself, like something heavy was wrapped around me. I didn't speak. I just sat still, staring at it in the thin air. Then I said in a small voice, "Maybe I need to find the prince I've been waiting for."

Noah's eyes stayed gentle. "Don't you want to go to work?" he asked, not just asking—but wanting to understand me. I tried to tell him what was going on inside me. But the words stayed locked away.

"I don't feel good," I finally murmured, hoping to end the conversation.

Picking up my phone, I dialed my workplace.

"It's Anna. I'm not feeling well today… No, I won't be working for a while—Okay, bye," I said abruptly before hanging up.

Noah's concern deepened. "Are you unwell?" he asked softly.

I nodded faintly.

"Do you need to go to the doctor?" Noah asked.

"No," I said, my voice flat.

"Then what's going on?" he asked quietly.

"I just want some time by myself."

"You mean… You want to live alone?"

"Yes."

Noah went quiet, thinking. "Are we… ending things?" he asked at last.

I nodded, saying nothing, but the answer was clear.

A New Track

Later, I visited a doctor and found out that I had a stomach ulcer.

I stayed home all winter, trying to get better. But I knew that being alone for too long would only make things more complicated. I pushed myself to take the first step toward getting my life back on track. I wanted to be more independent and not let this tough time shape who I was.

One cold February morning, I visited the employment office in search of a fresh start.

A middle-aged woman greeted me warmly.

"What can I help you with today?" she asked.

"I want to switch jobs," I said with confidence. "I'm looking for something that gives me more freedom."

She asked, "What kind of job are you thinking about?"

I said, "Something where I can make my own decisions—hopefully out in the countryside." I'm just saying it gave me a bit of hope. I envisioned a quiet, calm place far from office stress, where I could feel freer and more in control of my life.

As winter loosened its cold claws, I received a call from the employment agency.

They had found a position for me on a private farm in a small village near the Fox River, roughly ten miles southeast of Marengo, Illinois. The area was often described as the gem of the Fox River Valley—a breathtaking landscape where the river wound its way through picturesque woodlands and rolling fields.

The job was going to last for at least six months.

My main tasks were to cook and clean for a woman who was expecting a baby while her husband managed the farm.

Love in Revolutionary Tehran

1: A Stranger's Voice Across Borders

Hi there!

I saw your name online and felt like I should reach out.

My name is Nika Tauchali, and I've wanted to talk with someone from Iran. I'm happy it's you. I'd love to tell you about my life—especially the love that blossomed during a time when Iran was undergoing significant changes.

We'll spend around half an hour together, and during that time, I'll walk you through the turning points of my life. You can leave the video call whenever you wish—but I'll keep speaking until I've shared the heartbeat of my love story: the moment that shaped everything, and what it taught me.

2: Memory's Echo from Tehran

Now that it's 2024, memories of 1979—when I was only nineteen—flashbacks in my mind.

Being here today demonstrates the strength of the human spirit and how we can overcome challenging times.

I'm not saying this to dwell on the past but rather to emphasize the importance of moving forward. The pain from those days still feels real and reminds me that life can be fragile—but it also shows that determination can help us get through anything.

From midday on Monday, January 8, 1979, to dawn on Tuesday, January 9, 1979, marked the happiest time of my life.

I'm about to tell you an essential part of my life.

As I think back, I'm starting to make sense of things that confused me for a long time—things I only began to understand years after going through a complex and painful period.

Over time, I've started to see more clearly what happened in Iran and why the revolution took place, even though I still don't know the whole truth.

3: The Revolution's First Tremor

Before I discuss the main issue I want to share, I think it's essential to explain just how serious and upsetting the Iranian Revolution was.

It shook the country deeply. No one knows how long it will take for Iran to fully recover and regain the strength it had before the King was forced to leave.

4: The Machinery Beneath Collapse

At the time, Iran was on the verge of a sudden revolution. For years, there has been talk about the King and his rule; at the same time, some countries, eager to get a piece of the Iranian pie, have tried to indoctrinate the people with negative propaganda to overthrow the King and establish a government that would benefit them more.

Instead of giving the people the opportunity to appreciate the King through awareness and dialectical debate, government leaders resorted to censorship and repression, obstructing free and fair discussion and manipulating public opinion through bans and political criminalization.

At the same time, under the guise of advancing Iran through five-year development plans, an influx of unskilled foreign workers flooded the country.

This led to countless skilled Iranian citizens losing their jobs and seeking employment abroad, particularly in neighboring Arab nations.

Over time, specific teachings and beliefs broke down the confidence Iranians had in their nation.

People began to feel lost—cut off from their roots and unsure where they belonged.

As this sense of unrest grew, religious figures found an opening to share powerful promises of hope. They painted a future where, by driving out the so-called 'enemy'—the King—they would welcome a 'savior' in his place—the religious leader of the revolution.

This sentiment spread rapidly among the student body at Tehran University, which grew increasingly restless and vehemently opposed to the King.

Yet, none of us could have foreseen that, with our own hands, we were surrendering our beloved Motherland to a group of gangsters masquerading as clerics.

We could never have imagined that once the religious gangs had seized power, they would unleash a reign of terror—slaughtering Iranian citizens, seizing property, and systematically dismantling both lives and the nation itself.

Over time, I turned to the theory of deductive reasoning and realized that premises are not always true and that the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend.

5: Theater Students Building Castle in the Air

On the morning of Monday, January 8, 1979, we, a group of theater students—organized a protest performance against the King in the courtyard of Tehran University.

At the time, I believed we were doing something extraordinary. Little did we know that our actions were like spitting into the wind, only for it to blow back in our faces.

We couldn't believe that once the mullahs took power, they would view not only us but the entire Iranian citizenry as their primary adversaries, working tirelessly to silence us.

Had our society embraced open debate and unbridled intellectual curiosity earlier, we could have faced turbulent shifts in governance with greater resilience.

6: When I Was Nineteen

When I was nineteen, my heart was full of endless hope. But I was still too young and believed everything was possible, never guessing how much I'd be tested. Life stood just ahead, patient and unassuming, holding lessons I hadn't dreamed of—ready to shape me in ways I couldn't yet grasp.

7: When I Was Four

When I was four, my parents bought a two-story house.

Shortly after, they visited a nursery and brought home boxwood seedlings.

They showed me how to plant them in our picturesque garden, next to a pond with a gentle fountain.

On soft afternoons, my mother would make tea on the samovar, and my father and I would sit by the boxwoods, sipping tea and nibbling on bread and feta cheese.

Afterward, my mother often played hide-and-seek with me or built makeshift fabric houses near the boxwoods—something I adored.

8: The Quiet of Her Absence

My mother got sick and died when I was only seven.

When I missed her, I would escape to our quiet garden.

The scent rising from the earth near the bushes made me think of her velvety hand—soft and friendly.

I would close my eyes and imagine her next to me, smiling, perhaps helping me pull blankets over chairs to build our hiding places, just like we used to do.

9: My Father's Other Life

My father, a Green Beret colonel in the Imperial Commando Army, retired a year earlier at the age of 51 after thirty years of service. He turned to the carpet business in Tehran's Grand Bazaar, a family trade passed down from his beloved father.

His work may have occupied him, but I was always his top priority.

10: A Father's Love in Two Roles

He wasn't just my dad—he also took on the role of a mom.

My dad decided not to marry again because he didn't want me to have a stepmother.

He was kind and always around when I needed him. He helped me learn things and showed me how to find my way.

His greatest concern was the light in my eyes—that joy lingered, that I flourished.

Day after day, he gave his all, steady and unwavering, so that I could rise toward the vision I held close.

I used to go to school early in the morning, and when I came back, I would sit in the kitchen and do my homework. In the meantime, Dad would always patiently come in and go over my difficult math questions or help me with my writing. He taught me the importance of school and learning.

11: Dreams Drawn in Pencil and Purpose

When I started my first semester at university, I was focused on my future. I wanted to finish school, get a degree, find a good job, start a family, and one day enjoy life with my children and grandchildren.

I kept my distance from those who treated relationships like passing trends, missed lectures without care, and shrugged off their studies.

12: Belonging in the Eye of the Storm

Returning to the Iranian Revolution, I must admit that it remains a complex subject for me to understand fully. Who was really behind the movement that turned students into tools against the King? To this day, that question remains unanswered—like a missing piece of a puzzle we may never find.

At that time, various political groups began to emerge. Each group had its own set of beliefs, which influenced the way people discussed politics on campus.

Students got very involved in these debates.

I knew my dad disagreed with the people who were against the King, but I still joined them.

At the time, I didn't know why. Looking back, I think I just wanted to feel like I was part of something. It's normal to want to be accepted when you're young.

That feeling, combined with my beliefs at the time, led me to follow the group I truly wanted to belong to.

13: Theater, Revolution, and the Spark of Life

Something happened on Monday, January 8, 1979, that couldn't be undone.

We were university students in Tehran, and we truly believed we were helping to make history—but we didn't know we were being tricked.

14: Lunch with the Stranger Who Saw Me

After our intense and emotional theater performance at the University of Tehran, a young, thin, blond man with blue eyes approached me and said, "Hello! I like your shawl."

He was referring to my Arafat shawl, which was popular among students.

Judging by his accent, I guessed he was American.

Unsure he was addressing me or someone else, I glanced around briefly.

Realizing he was speaking to me, I replied, "Thanks!"

A brief flutter stirred in my stomach as I maintained eye contact.

"Will you let me have lunch with you today?" he asked politely.

A quiet feeling rose inside me—my thoughts calm and steady, like a slow wind. *Stay focused*, reason said. *School comes first*. But deep down, something else called, *Don't wait. Joy doesn't last forever*.

It felt like an ordinary choice, but I still followed my heart. "Okay," I said. "Let me finish this. I'll come in thirty minutes."

He agreed, and I saw some classmates watching us.

They looked curious—maybe even a little judgmental.

Monir, a female student who always dressed stylishly and had a kind smile, told me I should go.

I trusted her, so I headed off to meet the young man, wondering what the lunch might be like.

Introducing himself as Adam Waterblue, he respectfully opened the car door for me.

We drove silently for a while, and although I felt no fear—thanks to my father's self-defense training—I was prepared for any scenario.

Contrary to the political indoctrination I had received, I felt an unexpected sense of peace and security in Adam's presence.

Breaking the silence, I asked, "What made you come to me among all these people and say my scarf is beautiful?"

"I like Audrey Hepburn," he replied. "When I saw you, I felt you resembled her, and I told myself I had found the person I was looking for."

Familiar with college boys' tricks, I chose to remain silent.

We got to Arya-Mehr Street, and Adam parked the car outside the Continental Hotel.

He pointed to a restaurant nearby called T-Bone and said, "Let's eat here."

I looked at the name and asked, "Why is it called T-Bone?"

He said, "It's because they cook meat on a bone shaped like a 'T.'"

I told him I don't eat meat—I'm vegetarian.

He smiled and said, "No problem! I'll get something called a vegetarian T-green."

15: A Vegetarian T-Green and a Marriage Proposal

Inside, almost every table in the restaurant was occupied by guests who appeared to be from other countries—chatting, laughing, and passing plates around.

A restaurant manager led me to a reserved table, and Adam's respectful demeanor continued to impress me.

When I asked about the special treatment, he explained that the restaurant catered to foreign embassy staff in Tehran.

Once our food arrived, I also asked if he was a vegetarian,

"No," he replied, "but courtesy requires that I share the same meal as my guest to demonstrate my integrity."

Unsure of what he meant, I began eating my food.

I noticed Adam watching my face and behavior as he ate. Then, mid-meal, he asked, "Do you have a fiancé? I mean, are you involved with someone?"

I replied, "No."

He asked, "Would you accept if I asked you to marry me?"

With the spoon still in my mouth, I froze.

After a moment of thought, I asked, "Are you serious or joking?"

"I'm serious," he said.

"Well, this is Iran, and every province has its own traditions. I was raised without a mother but by my good father, who has been my best friend and guide. Your offer is a commitment that requires me to be true to you with all my heart and life."

He looked at me, puzzled. "I'm not sure I get what you're saying."

"This matters," I said quietly. "I have to talk to my dad before I can give you a real answer."

He nodded slowly. "Okay. So... what do you think we should do?"

16: The Most Important Call

I said, "I'll call Dad. He'll either tell us what to do or take care of everything," and was sure Dad knew what to do.

He nodded, waved to the waiter, and said, "She needs a phone."

"Sure, please come with me," the waiter replied.

I followed him to a room where he showed me the phone, bowed slightly, and left.

I called my dad and shared all the details with him.

The Wolf's Love

Arrival at Television House

David and his twelve-year-old son, Alex, arrived right at 9 a.m. It was Saturday, August 8, 2020. They had looked forward to this day for a long time.

Television House stood on a small mountain in Abashir.

A wolf howled deep in the forest behind the building. The sound was loud and eerie.

The silence around them became uneasy, as if something strange was about to happen.

Inside, the building was full of people practicing their lines and checking equipment to get everything ready for the live show.

The father spoke with the receptionist at the front desk, who quickly made a phone call.

Soon, a woman arrived with a bright smile.

"Hello! We've been looking forward to your arrival. Let me take you to the makeup room as planned."

Her friendliness instantly put them at ease.

She turned to the receptionist and added, "Please let the producer know they've arrived."

The receptionist nodded and relayed the message without delay."

Behind the Scenes Preparation

The woman led Alex and David down a brightly decorated hall lined with posters from past shows.

People were busy getting everything ready at the last minute.

The studio was full of movement and energy.

The lighting engineer in charge of the lights asked the producer, "Does the lighting look good, or do you want to change anything?"

"No changes needed—it's perfect for the TV host, the prodigy, and our expert," the producer replied with confidence.

The script supervisor entered the studio and informed the producer, "You've got a phone call."

With practiced urgency, the producer moved into the control room and picked up the receiver. "Producer Arta speaking," he answered.

"What's your show about? You've been talking about it a lot," the caller asked.

"It's about a very smart twelve-year-old who has an amazing ability to learn things quickly," the producer said, sounding impressed.

"What makes him so special?"

"He knows everything—without even needing books," the producer replied.

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything. I don't have time to talk now, but you can call during the live show if you have questions. Thanks!"

Just as he hung up, a voice crackled through a speaker in the control room above the switchboard: "Producer Arta, the boy's makeup is finished. Would you like to check it?"

"I'll be there shortly," he responded.

A Mysterious Professor

On his way to the makeup room, the producer met his assistant, who managed his schedule and tasks.

"The receptionist just called. A professor is interested in joining the program," she informed him.

The producer considered this briefly. "Thank him for coming, but let him know that only staff are allowed on this program. The boy is too young to participate in person." He walked to the makeup room.

Concerns in the Makeup Room

When the producer entered the makeup room, he smiled and said, "Hello!"

The boy's father, who was sitting next to him, greeted him back.

The producer watched as the makeup artist carefully put brown powder on the boy's face. Seeing the boy's reflection in the mirror, he moved closer to get a better look. "Are you ready?" he asked.

"We're all set," the makeup artist responded. "Does it look good?"

The producer examined the boy's face in the mirror and hesitated. "It's good, but could you step outside for a moment?"

The father, visibly concerned, watched as the makeup artist stepped out with the producer.

The producer lowered his voice. "The makeup makes the boy's face look too narrow," he said. "His mouth and jaw give him a wild look—almost like a wolf.

"I'll make some changes," she said gently.

Inside the Room

The boy's father overheard them talking.

He stepped outside and asked, "Is something wrong?"

"Yes," he said quietly.

"Is this about the money you said you'd pay us?" the father asked.

"No," the producer replied, smiling. "It's not about that. It's about your son—he's going to be remembered."

"Oh, really?" he said. "Should I make toast and sit back while he becomes a legend on two wheels?"

The producer was momentarily at a loss for words.

At Home: Waiting for the Show

The boy's mother and sister sat in front of the television.

The mother proudly said to her daughter, "Our son will amaze everyone with his knowledge during the show, starting four minutes in."

The sister, five years older than the boy, urged, "Don't change the channel, Mom!" as she ate a cookie.

"I'm trying to find the right channel," the mother replied.

"They said channel five—look, it's channel five!" the sister exclaimed, her voice tinged with excitement.

"They're always talking on the screen," the mother muttered skeptically.

The sister held her wristwatch up to her Mom and said, "There are just five minutes left until the show starts."

The phone rang

The mother hurried to the phone. She picked up the receiver, glanced out the window, startled by the howl of a wolf. She quickly shut the window, resting her hand on the receiver. Then, with a playful, mime-like expression, she whispered to her daughter, "It's your grandma! She's congratulating us."

She continued on the phone, "We're waiting for the program. Why don't you and Dad come here? It's close by. See you soon."

She hung up, but the phone rang again.

Frustrated, she answered, "Yes...?"

When silence greeted her, she hung up and resumed watching TV.

"Who was that?" the sister asked.

"A wrong number!"

"Be quiet! There's only one minute left!" the sister urged impatiently, her excitement evident.

Studio Preparations and Countdown

Preparations were completed at the studio for the live broadcast of the life-changing Super Prodigy show.

A commanding voice echoed through the speakers: "Quiet! Clear! Countdown! 10... 9... 8..."

The TV host adjusted his tie and looked at the boy and the expert sitting next to him.

The boy smiled confidently, while the expert nodded, knowing how talented the boy was.

In the control room, the producer listened closely as the countdown continued: "7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1!"

The boy's heart beat faster as the countdown reached its final seconds—he was excited.

The show's opening played on every monitor screen in the control room."

Excitement at Home

At the boy's house, his mother and sister sat eagerly in front of the TV, excited to see him on the show.

"Mom, be quiet! It's starting!" the sister said, unable to hide her excitement.

The mother watched the screen with pride. Just then, the doorbell rang.

The sister jumped up, opened the door, and greeted their visitors. "Hey, Grandma and Grandpa, come in. The program has already started."

"We got scared on the way here," Grandma said.

"Why?"

Grandpa exclaimed, "Didn't you hear that? A wolf was howling! Listen for yourself!"

By the television, the sister exclaimed, "The show just started!" But her excitement quickly turned to frustration as the conversation behind her grew louder.

Grandma, sitting on the couch, struggled to take off her coat. "The last time I heard wolves howl in this town was thirty years ago! Doesn't this one sound unusual?"

"Be quiet, Grandma! I want to watch this!" the sister snapped.

Still Home When the Broadcast Starts

The excitement in the room rose as the host appeared on the TV screen.

"Good evening, everyone," the TV host greeted.

Grandpa sat back on the couch. He said, "It's been many years since wolves lived in these woods."

"Grandpa, please stop talking!" the sister said, sounding annoyed.

"Why are you telling me to be quiet?" Grandpa replied.

On the TV Screen, the host leaned in and spoke clearly. "Tonight's show is something special— a story about a very gifted child that will surprise and inspire you."

The family leaned forward, curious and proud.

Then the boy's face appeared on the screen.

For a moment, no one said a word.

Grandpa grumbled, "Why are you being rude, telling me to shut up?"

Mom gently leaned toward her father and said "Don't be upset, Dad! She just wants to focus on watching her brother on TV."

The room fell silent, attention fixed on the TV host as he continued. "We have a boy who can answer any question not yet covered in reference books."

A wolf's howl reverberated through the walls of the boy's family home as they watched television.

"Listen! Did you hear it? A wolf's howl!" Grandpa exclaimed.

"Please, Grandpa, be quiet! I want to watch the show!"

The TV host added, "We are waiting for your phone calls. Our prodigy boy will answer your questions, overseen by a panel of five professors from various fields who serve as our experts. They will determine whether the boy answers faster and more accurately than the computer."

Tracking the Wolves

The Animal Welfare Organization, a dedicated entity that protects endangered species, has implemented protective measures, including breeding programs and habitat preservation initiatives.

It includes one of the last surviving families of the Abashir wolf—a gray wolf whose mate had been killed by a smuggler.

The pregnant female wolf survived, and her four cubs were born under the strictest surveillance to ensure their survival, reproduction, and protection within a designated area.

Digital transmitters had been implanted under the mother wolf's and cubs' skin to send signals to the organization's receptors.

These signals served three purposes: to monitor their condition and location, to ensure they remained within the protected area, and to alert the rescue team in the event of danger.

A middle-aged man in a white medical coat walked through a long, narrow corridor in the facility. He entered a room where a young female computer operator worked at a control panel, observing the movements of the mother wolf and her cubs on the monitors.

Signal Trouble

The computer operator stared at the monitor. Something looked wrong.

The chip under the mother wolf's skin wasn't sending a good signal. It couldn't connect properly with the system at the center.

Because of that, she couldn't figure out where the wolf was.